

Message Text

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PAGE 01 AMMAN 05842 101456Z
ACTION SS-25

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INFO AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE
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AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA

S E C R E T AMMAN 05842

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, PGOV, LE, JO, XY
SUBJECT: SYRIAN REACTION TO LEBANESE SITUATION

SUMMARY: ABDUL MONEM RIFAI MET ASSAD JULY 7 AND FOUND HIM CALM ON LEBANESE SITUATION BUT DETERMINED TO BRING CHRISTIAN MILITIAS INTO DISCIPLINED STATE; ALTHOUGH WITHOUT INTENT TO DESTROY THEM. ASSAD CONCERNED OVER ISRAELI ARMS SUPPLY SHIPMENTS BY SEA TO CHRISTIANS. ASSAD FELT SYRIAN ARMY DOING WHAT SARKIS WANTS BUT THAT HE WAS UNWILLING ENOUGH TO BRING ORDER. ASSAD DID NOT BELIEVE SARKIS WILL RESIGN. ASSAD SAID SYRIA WILLING TOLERATE SOME LEBANESE CHRISTIAN PROVOCATION BUT WOULD FIGHT ISRAEL IF IT INTERVENES IN LEBANON. KHADDAM REACTED NEGATIVELY TO U.S. PROPOSAL TO CALL FOR SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING BUT RIFAI SAID SYRIA WAS CONSIDERING PROPOSAL TO PUT LEBANESE SECURITY FORCES INTO CHRISTIAN AREAS OF EAST BEIRUT. END SUMMARY

1. JORDANIAN ELDER STATESMAN ABDUL MONEM RIFA'I GAVE
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AMBASSADOR A FULL ACCOUNT OF HIS LATE AFTERNOON AND EVENING JULY 7 MEETINGS WITH SYRIAN PRESIDENT ASSAD, AS WELL AS OTHERS WITH FONMIN KHADDAM AND OTHER HIGH-RANKING SYRIANS, WHICH EMBASSY IS REPORTING IN SOME DETAIL BECAUSE OF POSSIBLE INSIGHTS DIRECTLY INTO SYRIAN REACTION TO LEBANESE SITUATION.

2. RIFAI SAID HE FOUND ASSAD VERY CALM AND COLLECTED DESPITE SERIOUS NATURE OF EVENTS UNFOLDING IN LEBANON. ASSAD HAD SHOWN SOME BITTERNESS, HOWEVER, TOWARD CHRISTIAN LEADERS IN LEBANON, PARTICULARLY CHAMOUN. ASSAD SEEMED CONVINCED LEBANESE CHRISTIANS WERE PROVOKING LEBANESE SITUATION AND SAID HE WAS DETERMINED TO BRING SUCH ACTIVITIES TO A HALT ALTHOUGH, UPON QUESTIONING, RIFAI SAID HE DID NOT BELIEVE ASSAD WAS AT ALL BENT ON ANNIHILATION OF CHRISTIAN MILITIAS, BUT MERELY INTRODUCING SOME "DISCIPLINE." ASSAD TOLD RIFAI "WE DO NOT WANT TWO ISRAELS OPERATING AGAINST US."

3. ASSAD TOLD RIFAI THAT SYRIANS WERE WILLING TO TOLERATE SOME PROVOCATIVE BEHAVIOR FOR SOME CHRISTIAN ELEMENTS. SYRIA, HOWEVER, WOULD NOT HESITATE TO FIGHT ISRAEL IF IT INTERFERED IN LEBANESE SITUATION. RIFAI CONCLUDED THAT ASSAD IS DETERMINED TO TEACH CHRISTIAN MILITIAS A LESSON BUT NOT TO ANNIHILATE THEM AND IS WILLING TO USE SOME RESTRAINT AGAINST CHRISTIAN PROVOCATIONS. RIFAI SAID SYRIANS WERE CONSIDERING POSSIBILITY OF PUTTING LEBANESE SECURITY FORCES INTO CHRISTIAN AREAS IN EAST BEIRUT DURING RIFAI'S VISIT, ALTHOUGH HE DID NOT KNOW OUTCOME OF THEIR DELIBERATIONS.

4. KHADDAM TOLD RIFAI THAT SYRIA REACTED NEGATIVELY TO U.S. PROPOSAL TO CONVOKE SECURITY COUNCIL AND TOLD
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U.S. THAT IF SUCH A STEP WAS TAKEN IT COULD WELL PUSH SYRIA TO REMOVE SYRIAN TROOPS FROM LEBANON AND RESULT WOULD BE CHAOS, RESUMPTION OF CIVIL WAR AND A SITUATION NOBODY WOULD DESIRE. SYRIA HAD TOO LARGE A RESPONSIBILITY FOR PEACE KEEPING TO ALLOW THIS TO HAPPEN. ASSAD TOLD RIFAI THAT RECENT SYRIAN MILITARY MEASURES WERE ENTIRELY JUSTIFIED IN BRINGING ORDER AND THAT THESE ARE STEPS THAT EVEN SARKIS WOULD WISH TO TAKE BUT WAS UNWILLING TO AUTHORIZE ON HIS OWN. ASSAD SAID HE DID NOT BELIEVE SARKIS WILL CARRY THROUGH HIS RESIGNATION THREAT AND HAD PHONED SARKIS "TO TELL HIM" NOT TO RESIGN. RIFAI SAID ASSAD IS PARTICULARLY BITTER TOWARD CHAMOUN AND THE RIFT IS PROBABLY UNRECONCILABLE. RIFAI SAID THAT HE (RIFAI) HAD TRIED TO PUT IN A GOOD WORD FOR PIERRE GEMAYEL AND ASSAD REACTED POSITIVELY.

5. RIFAI SAID HE ALSO MET WITH MINISTER OF INTERIOR, HEAD OF NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL AND OTHER TOP SYRIAN LEADERS. ACCORDING TO SOME AUTHORITATIVE SYRIAN OFFICIALS ONE MAJOR CONTRIBUTION TO SYRIAN REACTION AGAINST CHRISTIAN MILITIAS WAS RESULT OF INCIDENT IN WHICH MILITIAS CUT THE THROATS OF 35 SYRIAN NATIONALS (COMMENT: EMBASSY

IS UNSURE WHETHER RIFAI HAS HIS FACTS STRAIGHT; OTHER THAN BEKA GREEK CATHOLIC SLAUGHTER, WE ARE UNAWARE OF ANY SUCH INCIDENT AND BEKA INCIDENT WE THOUGHT WAS ONLY INVOLVING LEBANESE.)

6. COMMENT: ADDRESSEES WILL RECOGNIZE THAT RIFAI IS EXTREMELY CLOSE TO SYRIANS AND IS INCLINED TO SUPPORT THEIR POINT OF VIEW GENERALLY. ABOVE REPORT'S MAJOR INTEREST IS IN RIFAI'S FIRST-HAND ACCOUNT OF ASSAD'S REACTIONS TO LEBANESE SITUATION. PICKERING

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